Lowell, A. Clotilda
Working for the Blind

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WORKING FOR THE BLIND

A. Clotilda Lowell, 1929

"Slowly has passed the night of blindness.
Behold the miracle of Day!"

THESE lines, written by her own hand, appear on a photograph of Helen Keller hanging in the Library and Museum of the American Foundation for the Blind, where I have worked for nearly a year. They express just exactly what the Foundation is trying to do—bring "the miracle of Day" to the many blind people, over a hundred thousand of them, in the United States.

Before I started work at the Foundation, I knew, of course, that there were a good many blind people, but I had no idea how many or what was being done for them. I had always had the idea that they were objects of pity and charity. You learn differently when you are actually working for and with them. Blind people don't want your pity; they don't ask for your charity. All they want is an opportunity to earn an honest living and to be self-supporting, to meet seeing people on their own ground.

There are schools for the blind all over the country, commissions for the blind in most states. But until the American Foundation for the Blind opened its doors there was no national agency to coordinate their efforts and to disseminate information about new educational methods, or new vocational fields opened to the blind. That is our function.

We conduct research to determine what vocations are possible for blind people to undertake; we study state legislation for the blind and endeavor to bring about its extension in those states where it already exists and its introduction in those states which so far have none; for five years, in conjunction with the Perkins Institution and Massachusetts School for the Blind, the Foundation conducted an experimental school to modernize educational methods in schools for the blind.

Two magazines are published under our name, each appearing five times a year, in alternate months, in both inkprint and braille. One is for workers for the blind and anyone else who is interested in such work, and the other is a professional magazine for teachers of blind children. The first tells what is being done in the field and what successful blind men and women are doing in their chosen professions, and similar subjects; the second includes articles by various teachers and educators in schools for the blind, telling of their methods in presenting their different subjects.

The executive alumnae secretary, the alumnae trustee, and the editor of the *Alumnae Bulletin* each reported on their activities. Mary Hodson reported for the nominating committee, and Mildred *Bailey* Lundberg gave a report on the work of the committee that drafted the proposed amendment to the by-laws of the Alumnae Associaiton. The report of the Alumnae Fund showed that the fund closed its second year with a balance of $786.11 which was used to enable several students to return this fall to Skidmore.

A recommendation from the student body that the traditional "Alma Mater" of the college be superseded by "The Hymn to Skidmore," a composition of President Moore's, was read by the chairman. The discussion that followed showed that there was strong feeling on this subject. The recent alumnae approved the change, while those of earlier classes were almost unanimous in their opposition. A vote which was taken to ascertain the sentiment of the meeting showed eighteen in favor of adopting "The Hymn to Skidmore" as the official Alma Mater, and thirty in favor of retaining the original "Skidmore Alma Mater." Some of those present who were not sure of their opinion refrained from voting.

It was announced that eight hundred of the Skidmore campus maps still remained unsold, but, as a substantial profit had already been realized on their sale, the remainder would be sold for twenty-five cents each.

Balloting on the Alumnae Association officers and on the proposed amendment to the by-laws had been going on during the meeting. Before the close of the meeting the announcement was made that the officers elected were

Jane Stearns '29, president
Margaret Burke '32, treasurer.

The amendment establishing an Alumnae Council to facilitate the business of the Alumnae Association was passed unanimously.

The new officers are both well known to graduates of the last few years. Jane Stearns during her two years as assistant to the dean also made many friends among alumnae of all classes. As student president of College Government, she proved both her popularity and her executive ability, and as an alumna she has shown her genuine friendliness and adaptability. Jane is now preliminary interviewer in the employment office of Lord and Taylor, New York City. Margaret Burke, the newly elected treasurer, was a prominent member of her class while in college. She is now connected with the National Dramatic Association, Inc.

The Foundation sends representatives all over the country to organize "Educational Weeks for the Blind" in the different cities. During these "Weeks" we attempt to show seeing people what needs to be done for the blind, and present articles made by the blind as a sample of the kind of work they are able to do. Helen Keller travels all over the United States lecturing and enlisting aid to enable the Foundation to continue its work.

We have a lending library of inkprint books for anyone interested in work for the blind, and have quite a large circulation. Through this library we also conduct a clearing house for all braille books published in the United States and Great Britain. Braille printing houses wishing to bring out a book must first inquire through the Foundation whether it has been reserved previously for some other publisher. Quarterly lists of proposed publications and completed books are sent out. Incidentally, it was through the Foundation's efforts that a uniform braille system was adopted in the United States and Great Britain, to the end that there may be no duplication in the embossing of books in braille for English-speaking blind people. The Foundation also sponsored an amendment to the Federal Constitution whereby the Library of Congress sets aside a sizeable sum each year to finance the publication of books in braille. Besides the regular library work, we also have a fascinating museum of documents relating to the life of Helen Keller, and a collection of appliances of all sorts that have been invented for the use of the blind.

We arrange for a substantial discount on watches for the blind. Such watches have faces like an ordinary watch, supplemented by raised dots to indicate the hour. The crystal is on a hinge, so that the blind person may read the time on his watch without difficulty. The same department that handles the watches, also arranges for large discounts on radios. Besides these, we give free radios to those blind people who are unable to buy them for themselves. Here is a direct example of bringing light into darkness, for a radio is a constant source of pleasure to a blind person. It is a thing he can operate for himself, without recourse to anyone else.

Each year we give about fifteen scholarships to deserving blind students, to enable them to continue their education and to prepare themselves to take up some chosen vocation when they have finished. The scholastic rating of these blind students is extraordinary. In fact, they generally rank very near the top.

There are two activities of ours, however, that I have found most interesting of all. The first one I am primarily interested in because I have been connected with it ever since I first started work at the Foundation. We are having manufactured a typewriter for the blind

that writes braille instead of ordinary type. I have charge of the orders for the machine, and it certainly keeps me busy. If it were not for the various models of the braillewriter, blind people would have a tedious time writing to each other. They have slates with elongated slots, through which they write with pen or pencil, but such letters must be read to them. They can write by means of a somewhat similar slate and a stylus, with which they make the raised dots which comprise the braille system. But this method is tiring and slow. People who do hand-transcribing of books into braille are specially handicapped if they have to write with the stylus, because the book paper they use is so heavy that they find it hard to make the dots. With a braillewriter, all you do is to press a key or combination of keys, and the dots are pressed into the paper. The machine we are bringing out is very good-looking—made of a highly polished aluminum alloy, it fairly shines. It has many of the gadgets found on ordinary typewriters, such as spacers, carriage release, and so on. We are terribly enthusiastic about it.

The other activity of the Foundation that I find so interesting is the so-called "Talking Book," which we hope to bring out soon. It is a method we have devised for recording books on a specially-made phonograph record. The machine that plays these records will also play ordinary phonograph records, and some of the models contain a radio. The recording is unusually clear. I heard part of Booth Tarkington's "Monsieur Beaucaire" one day when I was in the studio taking dictation, and I could hardly keep my mind on my letters, the story was so interesting. The records are extraordinarily thin, and a dozen or so of them, which are enough to contain a full-length novel, take up no more space than a braille book. It is our hope that some day these "Talking Books" will be distributed just like library books, and will be available to all blind people. Though very few realize it—I know I didn't until I actually saw the figures—about two-thirds of all the blind people in the United States are unable to read braille, especially those blinded in later life when their fingers are no longer sensitive enough to feel the dots. These people are shut away from much of the contact that makes life worth living for them. They are dependent upon others to read to them, and that is not always possible. We believe that the "Talking Book" will revolutionize their lives.

There are other activities carried on by the Foundtaion, but space does not permit me to write of them. What remaining space I have I want to devote to telling something about the blind people with whom I work. Our executive director, Mr. Robert B. Irwin, is totally blind, and has been since he was a child. In spite of this, he is a college graduate, and internationally known in work for the blind. He commutes daily from Montclair, New Jersey, and recently flew to the

Pacific Coast to demonstrate the "Talking Book" there. We also have three blind dictaphone operators, one of whom shares an office with me. They are all excellent typists, and carry the burden of correspondence from the offices of the staff members, and do a good job of it, too. They find their way unaided about the various parts of the office. They are unfailingly cheerful, and just like anyone else. I am glad to have had the opportunity to meet them and work with them, for it seems to me that we seeing people might learn a good deal from them.

I realize that I haven't said anything about my own particular work, but I have become so interested in the work of all parts of the Foundation, as I have come in contact with it, that I can't seem to write about anything else. Come to our offices and studio in the Grand Central Palace, and you'll see why.

THE ROUT

A. Clotilda Lowell, 1929

Scarlet and gold,
Trembling yet bold,
The army of the leaves came down—
Besieged the town.

The wind blew strong,
And the bright throng
Scattered like dust before his wrath.
But in his path

Corps upon corps,
Thousands and more—
A crimson splash against the hill—
Lay hushed and still.

The vanguard fled,
Leaving their dead
In restless sleep along the way
Until one day

In mournful hosts
The lovely ghosts
Of summer slipped across the lawn
And then were gone.

PARCHING THROUGH GEORGIA

Helen Harrell Crickmay, 1925

G'O'GIA, home of co'n liquor, unusual political personalities, Uncle Remus, and a larger percentage of illiterates than are in any other state of the Union, has been my post office address for the past year and a half. Down here I've gained fifteen pounds and a lot of experience, some of which has been requested in written form for the *Bulletin*. In following my geologist husband around the back woods I have seemed to skim the surface of a world which is very distant and hazy to northerners, and I have tried to picture it here as I have seen it.

One thing I shall really miss this winter will be my weekly lectures to the Y. W. C. A. girls. The chairman of the Industrial Committee knew of my work in the mental hygiene department at Yale and induced me to attend the club of industrial girls—"girls who work with their hands." I started to join in their weekly meetings, and talked to them on whatever subject I thought would interest them, or they asked for. So in my own feeble way I covered personality problems, how to apply for a job, how to overcome shyness, inferiority complexes, lack of education, how to understand oneself and one's family, and by most frequent request—sex. They knew the stork story was a myth, but didn't know quite how much of a myth.

Meeting the girls themselves was a kind of shock. I knew these girls came from telephone switchboards, shirt, shoe, overall, and candy factories, bargain basements, and many of them had been out of work so long they could not be classified under any special trade. In the north we are accustomed to consider factory hands as "Wops," "Hunkies," or "Kikes." We know that they or their parents came from the old country, that they are often of low mentality and morals. These southern industrial girls are from "old families" and their handicap is lack of education and cultural background. They are bright, ambitious, good-looking. They come from small towns, or from farms which cannot support large families of children and educate them, too.

The girls are charming, enthusiastic, and regular sponges for information. It has been grand working with them; and now one of the things I miss is the big boost it has given my ego to be a semi-professional lecturer.

My husband thinks the mountaineers are much more interesting than these girls, and possibly he is right. I have been seeing the former for several years now and have almost forgotten the thrill it was at

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